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REVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONVENTION, PURSUANT TO ARTICLE 22, PARAGRAPHS 2 (a) AND 2 (b), AND ARTICLE 26 OF THE CONVENTION

REVIEW OF REPORTS ON IMPLEMENTATION OF AFFECTED AFRICAN COUNTRY PARTIES, INCLUDING ON THE PARTICIPATORY PROCESS, AND ON EXPERIENCE GAINED AND RESULTS ACHIEVED IN THE PREPARATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF NATIONAL ACTION PROGRAMMES

SYNTHESIS AND PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS OF INFORMATION CONTAINED IN REPORTS SUBMITTED BY AFFECTED AFRICAN COUNTRY PARTIES

Note by the secretariat

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Introduction

1. Under article 26 of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, each party must communicate to the Conference of the Parties reports on the measures which it has taken for the implementation of the Convention. In that context, affected country parties provide a description of the strategies they have drawn up, as well as a detailed description of action programmes, together with any relevant information concerning their implementation.

2. At its first session, in decision 11/COP.1, the Conference of the Parties set out guidelines and procedures to organize and streamline the communication of information in pursuance of article 22, paragraphs (a) and (b), of the Convention, in order to facilitate its review.

3. The institutional mechanism set up to assist in the review of the implementation of the Convention is described in decision 1/COP.5, concerning the establishment of a committee for the review of the implementation of the Convention as well as its mandate and functions.

4. In December 2001 the secretariat of the Convention prepared a guide to help national focal points in preparing the second series of national reports (ICCD/CRIC(1)/INF.4). This guide was produced by updating the first version, dating from July 1999 (ICCD/COP(3)/INF.3). It takes into account observations made by country parties in Africa, Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean.

5. The first series of national reports from affected African country parties, a synthesis of which (ICCD/COP(3)/5/Add.2) was submitted to the Conference of the Parties at its third session, made it possible to take stock of measures taken in the priority areas and draw relevant conclusions, in particular on the preparation and implementation of national action programmes to combat desertification. They also focused attention on difficulties encountered, especially with regard to articles 6 to 9 of annex I, concerning the implementation of the Convention at the African regional level.

6. The first synthesis of the information provided by the affected African country parties in May 1999 was prepared on the basis of 39 national reports which reached the secretariat before the target date. Three other countries, which had submitted their first reports after that date, presented them to the inter-sessional Ad Hoc Working Group in 2001. Consequently, 42 reports were covered by the first review. The present synthesis and preliminary analysis relates to 47 national reports submitted to the secretariat before 30 April 2002 (see annex I). These are either updated versions of the first series of national reports (40 countries) or new reports (7 countries); only 2 countries did not submit a second edition of their 1999 reports. The second synthesis is based on experience with the first, the report submitted by the Ad Hoc Working Group to the Conference of the Parties at its fifth session (ICCD/COP(4)/AHWG/6) and the guidelines set out in the guide to the preparation of the second series of national reports.

7. The seven key thematic topics for the review are enumerated in paragraph 10 of decision 1/COP.5 of 12 October 2001. They appear in full in the subheadings in chapter II, entitled "Synthesis of information provided in the reports".

I. OVERVIEW OF REPORTS AND OBSERVED TRENDS

8. The process of preparation and implementation of national action programmes to combat desertification is well under way in most of the country parties which have submitted reports. However, the degree of progress made differs greatly from one country to another, though they have clearly moved forward since the submission of the first series of national reports in 1999. Twenty-seven countries out of the 47 have now completed the phase of preparing their national action programmes (NAPs) (see annex II).

9. The NAPs will henceforth constitute instruments of central importance to any desertification control efforts. Examination of past experience in each country helped to identify the baseline situation on which these programmes could be drawn up. The need to incorporate them in development plans or policies is widely acknowledged, but it is not yet a reality in all countries. These programmes are widely perceived as instruments which can contribute to better understanding of the formulation of strategies to combat poverty.

10. The participatory process, whereby a variety of components of civil society are mobilized, has become an irreversible feature in all countries, and the process of implementation of the Convention has made a major contribution in this regard. In most cases, this process is accompanied by efforts to decentralize authority for natural resources management and the related decision-making machinery.

11. All countries have, in keeping with their national circumstances, introduced institutional arrangements and new legislative or administrative provisions so as to create an environment which is more suited to the requirements of Convention implementation. Above and beyond the establishment of national coordinating bodies in all countries, some of the reports mention that environmental legislation has been adapted in order to take into account the Convention implementation process.

12. The evolution of the phenomenon of desertification, in general, and the extent of land degradation, as well as the steps needed to remedy them, were addressed by all the parties to the Convention by means of a global diagnosis of past experience. This experience covered the extent of physical degradation noted (land, water, forests, etc.), the causes, consequences and manifestations of desertification, the political, legislative and institutional machinery, the action taken and the methodological and strategic approaches to intervention.

13. The lack of adequate and predictable funding is universally regarded as a serious handicap which may hamper the launch of the implementation phase of the NAPs, which has taken place in very few countries. Efforts are under way in most countries to set up national funds to combat desertification, for the purpose of funding the priority activities identified in the programmes.

14. Most of the countries are counting on funding, pledged or not, in order to devise or strengthen effective systems for monitoring or assessing the effects of drought and the impact of the activities undertaken. This funding is also expected to permit the implementation of the recommendations of the Committee on Science and Technology relating to the development and use of benchmarks and indicators for desertification control efforts.

15. Most of the countries drew attention to the links of varying closeness between their national action programmes and the subregional action programme, and also - in just a few cases - with the regional action programme. These links exist first and foremost in the area of management of transfrontier natural resources, as well as topics such as integrated water resources management, soil conservation, renewable energies and environmental information and education.

II. SYNTHESIS OF INFORMATION PROVIDED IN THE REPORTS

A. Participatory processes involving civil society, non-governmental organizations and community-based organizations

16. In accordance with the principles set out in the Convention (art. 3 (a)), the design and implementation of national action programmes to combat desertification should be based on broad participation by populations and local communities. Country reports set out the approaches used, the participants involved, the concerted action organized with the various participants concerned and the strategies applied for information and awareness creation.

17. The approaches followed and the results achieved in the area of participation vary from one country to another. Some countries, particularly those in West Africa, drew on experience acquired in the process of decentralization. The administrative arrangements generated by such activities provided a favourable setting for fostering a process of participation. Other countries embarked on an unprecedented experience in their national decision-making process for the first time thanks to this provision of the Convention.

18. A wide range of actors representing various components of civil society have been affected, to a greater or lesser extent depending on the country; these are rural producers, religious and customary chiefs, non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations and women's and young people's associations. Added to this category of actor are the representatives of the technical departments of the ministries concerned, political forums and development partners. Generally speaking, these actors are represented in the national coordinating body. Most of the reports state that national non-governmental organizations operating in areas connected with desertification control are part of the international network of non-governmental organizations working to combat desertification (RIOD).

19. The reports indicate a variety of forms of cooperative machinery designed to ensure effective participation by all. Depending on the country, such cooperation is carried out at the local level, through national forums, by sector of activity concerned or by category of actors. In the words of some reports, it reflects a bottom-up, diversified approach. More than 75 per cent of the countries indicated that decentralized cooperation has been organized on the basis of equal participation by men and women.

20. It is clear that awareness creation and provision of information are ongoing activities which continue to facilitate participation and commitment by non-governmental participants in the process of preparing and implementing the NAPs and making possible greater understanding

of the provisions and the spirit of the Convention. Hence various strategies for awareness creation and provision of information have been launched by countries since the adoption of the Convention.

21. These strategies have covered, in particular, the organization of national awareness days and the mobilization of communication professionals to ensure broad dissemination of the provisions of the Convention. In this regard, the reports mentioned several types of activity, including the organization of political dialogues, the training of journalists, the production of radio and television programmes and the publication of articles on desertification in the press, the production of audiovisual material (documentaries, plays and special music focused on desertification or drought, advertisements and a variety of novelty items), summaries of the Convention in various national languages, and so on.

22. Some reports state that capacity-building sessions have been organized on community resource management strategies to ensure that local people participate effectively in and assume responsibility for desertification control at the national and local level. Other reports point to the need for greater mobilization of young people to guarantee that achievements are sustained over the long term. One report even underlines the importance of capacity-building to promote land ownership. Study tours to neighbouring countries have been organized for farmers to foster exchanges of traditional knowledge, promote participation by all those involved, draw on information networks and develop the ability of these actors to devise and apply measures that can contribute to the achievement of the objectives of the national action programmes to combat desertification.

23. Within the framework of new measures to facilitate NAP implementation, most of the reports mention major decisions taken to decentralize authority. In some countries, local machinery for desertification control has been established to promote participation. This machinery sometimes serves as the voice of the grass-roots population and plays a major role in all national activities relating to natural resources management and sustainable development. Their membership varies from one country to another, but in most cases includes representatives of decentralized State agencies, non-governmental organizations and local communities.

24. Most of the reports recognize the complexity of the participatory process, but also the interest shown by the various categories of actors in environmental issues. More than half the reports mention that groups of actors who have not hitherto played a major role in the debate on environment and development have been able to express their views and thus highlight their standpoints and their concerns. The diversity of the opinions has helped to enrich the participatory process, and different perceptions concerning the consequences of desertification in everyday life have enabled the content of the NAP to be better targeted.

25. Although some countries consider that not all the potential actors have been mobilized, and that participation by certain strategic groups was limited compared with the role they might play in the implementation of the national action programme to combat desertification, overall it was recognized that the foundations for a sustainable participatory process have been laid through the various bodies planned and the consultation machinery established.

26. Some reports note constraints, including disparities in terms of capacity as regards participation, and inadequate efforts in the provision of information and the creation of awareness in order to encourage people to regard the NAP as a basic tool for strategies relating to action in rural areas.

B. Legislative and institutional frameworks or arrangements

27. When preparing and implementing national action programmes, affected country parties have drawn on a variety of institutions, national machinery and legislative and administrative instruments to handle issues of planning, coordination, follow-up and monitoring. While some of these structures were set up for the purpose of implementation of the Convention, several already existed.

28. The establishment of a national coordinating body and the appointment of a national focal point in the NAP preparatory phase was adopted by all countries. However, the title, status, functions, reporting level and degree of decentralization vary from one country to another. Most of the country parties have placed their coordinating body under the aegis of a ministry (environment, agriculture or rural development) or attached it to an ad hoc or existing body (office of the director-general for the environment, national environment agency).

29. A greater degree of decentralization for national coordinating bodies would help to facilitate popular grass-roots mobilization for the preparation or implementation of the NAPs.

30. The national coordinating body is often responsible for preparing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating the national action programme. As some reports show, its role is sometimes more explicit: to provide advice, express opinions, review reports, organize missions for planning, monitoring and follow-up of progress in operations, and supervise participation by all the categories of actors involved.

31. The national coordinating body sometimes has a status which enables it to influence political and legislative decisions (reorganization of ministries, establishment of funds for desertification control, creation of new institutions, etc.). In contrast, a very small number of reports indicate clearly that the national coordinating body is a purely technical body which has no competence to address legislative or political issues.

32. The level of available resources and funding for each national coordinating body is rarely quantified. Almost all the reports state that the body has no budget of its own. However, the sources of the funds mobilized for the various activities linked to the process of NAP preparation or implementation (government, bilateral and multilateral partners, etc.) are mentioned in all the reports. But at least 20 of the reports state that the resources are inadequate. Very few reports clearly indicate the level of logistical resources available to the national coordinating body (personnel, means of communication and transport, etc.).

33. All the reports highlight the multidisciplinary and multisectoral nature of the national coordinating body. It is principally composed of representatives of different ministries (environment, agriculture, water, forests, finance, etc.), but also of representatives of technical departments, research institutes, universities, cooperation agencies, civil society, grassroots community organizations and non-governmental organizations.

34. Details are sometimes given of the arrangements for the appointment of the members of the national coordinating body, members being generally nominated by the institution for which they work and appointed either by presidential decree or by ministerial order. The extensive experience and professional skills of the members of the body are unanimously acknowledged: they have considerable experience and are specialists in their fields. Some reports indicate that the national coordinating body reserves the right to call on persons with other skills where necessary, but no mention is made of the use of experts from the roster of independent experts drawn up by the Convention secretariat. The bodies have between 12 and 25 members. In some cases, parity between men and women within the body (often 40 per cent women) is explicitly mentioned.

35. Beyond the national coordinating body, all the reports mention other new institutional, legislative and regulatory arrangements connected to a greater or lesser extent to the process of NAP preparation and implementation. Thus most of the reports note the adoption of legislation governing land problems, in other words laws on agrarian and land reorientation. Some countries have amended their environmental legislation to take account of the requirements arising from the process of preparation and implementation of the national action programmes.

36. Mention is sometimes made of the fact that forestry, mining, town planning, physical planning and water codes have been revised to adapt them to new circumstances. These initiatives have been dictated by the need for harmonization of domestic legislation.

C. Resource mobilization and coordination, both domestic and international, including conclusion of partnership agreements

37. In the Convention the importance of partnership and international cooperation in implementing national action programmes to combat desertification is recognized. Many reports demonstrate the usefulness of establishing partnership relations among Governments, development partners, non-governmental organizations, local people, and so on in the formulation, implementation and funding of national and subregional action programmes and the regional action programme.

38. For the countries of the Sahel, efforts to combat desertification began with the great drought of the 1970s, which was classified as a natural disaster. Integration of environmental problems in national development strategies began during that period, and the worst-affected countries drew up national plans to combat desertification, bearing different titles from one country to another. These documents formed a frame of reference for growing awareness of environmental problems, and particularly desertification, but enthusiastic support for their implementation did not result in practical action. The reasons for non-implementation lay mostly in the lack of financial resources, and to a lesser extent in the failure to involve all actors and also centralized management.

39. In countries which have finalized their NAPs, initiatives are being taken to examine the scope for establishing lasting partnerships in order to mobilize adequate financial resources to guarantee implementation of the NAPs. Very few countries mention the organization of consultations with national and international partners in order to mobilize the support needed for the implementation of the action programme. Only 25 per cent of the reports refer to the establishment, at the national level, of an informal process of cooperation with bilateral and multilateral partners to give consistency to their activities in the field of natural resources management and environmental protection, and more especially desertification control.

40. In a quarter of the countries, especially in the Sahel, such cooperation is made easier by the fact that one of the partner countries has agreed to take the lead in coordinating the various related activities. This cooperation machinery has in most cases contributed to the mobilization of the various contributions from the bilateral and multilateral partners towards the NAP preparation process. In contrast, half of the countries, in particular those located in less affected areas, are experiencing great difficulty in mobilizing development partners and stimulating their interest in the process of preparing and implementing the NAPs.

41. The reports reveal that the development partners are kept regularly informed of progress in the implementation of the national action programmes to combat desertification, through informal coordination meetings. In most countries, ad hoc financial support has been given to the process, either in terms of funds to support the operation of the national coordinating body, or in terms of support for the carrying out of specific thematic studies, or for the establishment of information systems, or for the provision of information and the creation of awareness among the actors, or for the organization of national workshops to prepare, validate and programme the NAP. Such financial support ranges between a few thousand dollars and over 500,000 dollars.

42. As far as possible, most of the countries have made fairly major financial efforts to launch the process of preparation of national action programmes, either under their budgets, or using other machinery. More than half the countries went so far as to explore the scope for setting up national funds to combat desertification to channel financial resources rapidly and efficiently to the local level. Others refer to the existence of such funds, which are, however, not operational. The idea of such funds, as often described in the reports, and whatever formula may have been chosen, is generally based on a degree of independence and on the principle of participatory management of the financial resources destined for the NAPs.

43. The originality of this approach lies in the identification of local resources to fund desertification control efforts. The reports generally list the following national sources to supply these funds: the national budget, the private sector, local communities, non-governmental organizations, etc. This demonstrates the commitment of the government authorities concerned. But the fact remains that without a fairly substantial external contribution, domestic efforts will not enable meaningful action to be taken commensurate with the concerns identified. The rapid process of pauperization of African countries is hardly conducive to the mobilization of domestic financial resources on a large scale in the short and medium term.

44. In addition, despite the commitment declared by countries, the different reports reflect the importance attached to bilateral and multilateral cooperation in financing the bulk of desertification control activities. These activities are generally linked to the NAP preparation

phase, that is to say the drafting of documents, the provision of information, the creation of awareness, various workshops, forums for the adoption or validation of the action programmes, as well as projects for the sustainable management of natural resources and environmental protection, in other words the integrated management of water resources, agroforestry, the use of renewable energies, agriculture, reforestation, etc. Most of the countries have benefited from ad hoc support from bilateral and multilateral partners during this preparatory phase. The wish most frequently expressed is that the partnership agreements relating to the national action programmes will help to mobilize the funding required for their implementation.

45. The countries place great hopes in the support from their development partners in the implementation of the NAPs, and emphasize that the implementation of the actions decided on calls for the mobilization of substantial funds. Pending the provision of this funding, many countries have embarked on activities in the areas of natural resource management, capacity-building, formulation and application of a land policy, agroforestry, erosion control, reforestation, soil conservation, research into certain forest species, local development, promotion of renewable energies, natural resources assessment, etc.

D. Linkages and synergies with other environmental conventions and, as appropriate, with national development strategies

46. In all countries, a wide range of activities are planned under the national action programme as a strategic action framework (creation of awareness among actors, land development, mobilization of water resources, establishment of machinery to open up remote areas, poverty reduction, etc.).

47. The various reports indicate that the countries devoted considerable efforts to sustainable management of the environment and desertification control following the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, when actions became more concerted and better targeted, with many factors taken into account. This led to the drawing up, in most countries, of a national document on sustainable development, which serves as a strategic framework. The steps taken to combat desertification after the ratification of the Convention and the launching of the implementation process culminated in the drawing up of specific plans and programmes by all these countries which wished to mark a break with the programmes that had been drawn up previously but had not been implemented.

48. In many States, there are national sectoral policies which embrace other sectors because of the interactions existing between them. For example, the formulation of a new energy policy may be combined with forestry policy, land policy, water resources and environmental protection. In this way, sectoral policies are drawn up for the main economic sectors, notably those which are directly linked with environmental protection and the sustainable management of natural resources. The Convention encourages efforts to achieve synergy among sectoral policies to ensure better application of major decisions in the field and a favourable perception of the efforts made.

49. Several affected country parties have adopted economic and social development programmes, environmental programmes and poverty reduction programmes; some countries indicate that the national action programme is a component of them. However, as NAPs have

not yet been finalized in half of the countries, and their implementation has not yet begun, the terms of this integration remain theoretical. Some countries define the NAP as an instrument for the implementation of the Convention, and others which have not yet drawn up a national Agenda 21 consider that the NAP could take its place.

50. It is clear from most of the reports that the national strategy to combat poverty, whether finalized or being prepared, now constitutes a strategic frame of reference in the field of sustainable management of the environment. In some countries, coordination and harmonization of desertification control activities are carried out hand in hand with the national poverty reduction strategy. This is dictated by the participatory and decentralized approaches that the countries have adopted.

51. Prior to the formulation of the national action programmes, the great majority of the countries had drawn up national plans of action for the environment, but also plans or programmes for agricultural development, development and management of forestry resources, and training and information in environmental matters and in efforts to combat poverty. Many reports indicate that there is a very strong correlation between the implementation of the NAP and these prior plans or programmes.

52. Some countries adopted regional action programmes, subregional action programmes and local action programmes within the framework of their NAPs. In this context, few reports take the trouble to underline the adoption of strategies designed to foster greater consistency and synergy between the different projects in order to avoid overlapping, duplication and coordination problems. A few countries recognize that other programmes are not dynamically linked and taken into account in their NAPs, while others indicate that there is real consistency between their NAPs and their regional, subregional and local action programmes.

53. A few reports state that the role of the NAP is to promote and stimulate the process of formulation of local development programmes. Some reports indicate that the countries concerned have adopted a decentralized structure and have thus made it easier to ensure consistency with programmes of rural development. Others have designated an institution to be responsible for subregional coordination or have entrusted that task to the focal point.

54. While developing national sectoral policies, the countries have also embarked on defining a national policy on decentralization. The decision to decentralize is justified by the adoption of new strategies for natural resources management, after it was observed that the earlier policies were defined and managed in a centralized manner, leading to the failure of a number of programmes. Most of the countries now base their environmental policies on the transfer of skills to local communities and the tackling of problems by local people themselves.

55. The reports submitted do not systematically bring out the synergy between the national action programmes and the other multilateral conventions on the environment or the national development strategies. However, when outlining the national strategies and the policies and programmes, all the countries emphasize the need for consistency between the sectoral policies and the implementation of the conventions. The quest for synergy between international conventions begins with efforts to ensure consistency among sectoral policies.

56. The links and synergies between the Convention and the other instruments are generally underlined in the national reports in the context of the establishment of a national coordinating body responsible for the implementation of the international conventions. Scope for synergy is more generally perceived between the Convention on Desertification and the Convention on Biodiversity because of the common denominator of natural resources. Most of the countries have set up a national framework to coordinate conventions whose task is to consider how best to ensure synergy between these conventions, though they continue to pursue an independent path under the supervision of their focal points.

57. The reports also emphasize that synergy should necessarily exist in the management of conventions through the formulation of requests for funding, since large numbers of requests militate against access to resources and their availability. Each of the three major conventions originating in the Rio de Janeiro Conference has a tendency to establish its own consultative machinery with the development partners, and this leads to a proliferation of funding needs and at the same time to difficulties in access to funding.

58. Most of the reports underline the constraints which to date have hindered sound environmental management and efforts to combat desertification, and which have stood in the way of synergies. These constraints include inadequate institutional machinery, lack of resources on the part of the State, lack of coordination between organizations and policies, centralization of authority and the predominance of the sectoral approach.

E. Measures for the rehabilitation of degraded land and for early warning systems for mitigating the effects of drought

59. Almost all the countries have carried out overall diagnostic studies of past experience in the management of natural resources, and in particular efforts to combat desertification. These studies have generally pointed to the manifestations of desertification and the strong pressure placed on natural resources by largely rural populations. They have also made it possible to appreciate the efforts made by countries to improve their environment and the living conditions of population groups affected by desertification.

60. The assessments conducted by the countries have shown that many projects and programmes designed to combat desertification and mitigate the impacts of drought have been carried out in Africa. These activities have focused on the forestry sector, the promotion of renewable and alternative energy sources, the management of water resources, agricultural development, the restoration of soil fertility, reforestation and measures to combat poverty.

61. Regarding the rehabilitation of degraded land or the establishment of early warning systems to mitigate the impacts of drought, the reports mention a number of measures taken by the countries. These include the creation of national, subregional and regional machinery to deal with environmental issues, the devising of methodological and strategic approaches to combat the degradation of natural resources, and the development of instruments for the implementation of desertification control policies. Improvement of the political, legislative and institutional arrangements in the countries has thus contributed to integrated management of natural resources and fostered a participatory and decentralized approach.

62. In some cases, reference to past experience provided a basis for the formulation of national and subregional action programmes and the regional action programme, which are basically founded on specific desertification control activities. In this framework, some countries report technical programmes and integrated projects organized to combat desertification.

63. Most of the reports refer to programmes or projects for the rehabilitation of degraded land, but it is difficult to know whether they fall within the framework of national action programmes to combat desertification or whether they are taken into account when these programmes are drawn up. The stages involved in the adaptation and integration of projects are not always clearly described in all the reports. In addition, a few reports mention that the projects under way in the fields of natural resource management and desertification control have not been recorded exhaustively. However, some countries plan to carry out an overall survey and then to adapt or integrate the projects and programmes under way in the NAP process and orient them in keeping with the objectives of the Convention.

64. It should be noted that, as regards the priority programmes drawn up under the Convention, most of the countries do not clearly specify, or rather do not distinguish between these programmes and the integrated programmes for desertification control. Yet a few countries have drawn up priority action programmes to launch field activities in keeping with the principles of the Convention. Most of the priority projects currently under way which fall within the framework of the NAP relate to various areas such as capacity-strengthening, conservation of natural resources, information, communication, enhancement of knowledge on desertification, and monitoring and evaluation of the impacts of desertification and drought.

65. The commonest areas of cooperation in the rehabilitation of degraded land include the sustainable management of shared water resources, the sustainable management of shared or transboundary plant and animal resources, the sustainable management of energy resources, efforts to combat pests affecting crops and forest species, early warning and mitigation of the effects of drought, scientific and technical cooperation, information, training, communication and the development of intraregional trade in local products.

66. Very few of the reports mention the role and place of the early warning system in strategies for reducing the impact of drought and desertification, in particular in the areas of food security. Just one report mentions the development or strengthening of the national meteorological network as a measure to strengthen the early warning system.

F. Drought and desertification monitoring and assessment

67. The process and dynamics of degradation are experienced at different levels and different rates in different contexts. In the countries of the Sahel, the reports emphasize the decline in rainfall, the resumption of wind activity, water erosion and pressure on natural resources. Phenomena observed on the physical level include a sharp reduction in woody species and continued degradation of plant cover, impoverishment of the soils and a fall in agricultural output, a reduction in water resources, withdrawal of fauna to forested areas and a deterioration in living conditions.

68. As regards activity management indicators and measurements, the information which emerges from the reports is of two types - a total lack of adequate measurement systems and the existence of machinery which is not operational for lack of resources. Some reports also mention the establishment of machinery for follow-up or evaluation to gauge progress made in combating desertification and mitigating the impacts of drought. Above all, it should be emphasized that in addition to the monitoring machinery, most countries are counting on the resources to be made available to them under the NAP in order to set up or upgrade their evaluation systems.

69. The countries expressed interest in measures which would enable them to assess the extent of degradation of natural resources and look forward to improved management. For the worst-affected countries, steps had already been taken along these lines before the adoption of the Convention. The NAPs made it possible to take stock of the situation with the aim of identifying priorities and possible solutions.

70. In addition to diagnostic activities, a number of other measures for the evaluation of natural resource degradation were highlighted, including the national networks of long-term environmental monitoring observatories launched at the initiative of the Sahara and Sahel Observatory, NAP monitoring and evaluation systems and thematic studies. Some countries indicate that their environmental information systems are operational, giving them the ability to gather more information and so ensure better monitoring and evaluation of desertification. Some others mention the existence of databases or the possibility of making use of the geographical information system to generate relevant information. DISMED (the Desertification Information System for the Mediterranean) plays a very important role in supporting regional action programmes in the Mediterranean countries.

71. Several reports indicate that the extent of resource degradation attributable to drought and desertification is visible, without providing more precise information. Some countries consider that benchmarks and evaluation indicators will become more precise and will be consolidated in the operational phase of their national action programmes.

72. Several parties recognize that the Convention has helped to strengthen partnership in efforts to combat desertification and to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of natural resource management. In this context, countries mentioned the establishment of national systems to gather information for reports on the state of the environment to be presented to Parliament. These documents list indicators in agriculture, forestry, fisheries, water resources, biological diversity and climate change. It is also stated that national forest inventories, which are updated every 10 years, allow the state and condition of forestry resources to be monitored.

73. Several reports mention participation by research workers and universities in scientific and technical monitoring during NAP implementation. Such activities could foster the development of scientific tools for enhanced monitoring and evaluation of drought and desertification.

74. It is mentioned that university institutions and research centres are pursuing a variety of topics in connection with desertification control and the monitoring of natural resource dynamics. The findings of the research programmes, in particular those relating to varieties,

should be incorporated in the activities carried out under desertification control projects. One country is taking steps to foster an environment conducive to scientific and technological activities. They are based on incentives for research, the establishment of a national scientific and technical information system, the creation of a national research system and a network for the exchange of information among institutions, as well as public awareness campaigns.

75. The progress made by subregional and regional institutions in developing benchmarks and indicators is mentioned in a number of reports.

76. The machinery and procedures for consultation with scientists include workshops, participation in scientific networks, consultative committees and sectoral steering committees (for forests, and annual meetings on agricultural research and technical services).

G. Access by affected country parties, particularly affected developing country parties, to appropriate technology, knowledge and know-how

77. None of the reports explicitly addresses the question of access to appropriate technology, knowledge and know-how. However, it was possible to obtain some information on the issue of technologies, particularly in the chapters dealing with the strategies and priorities set forth in the framework of plans or policies for sustainable development and the measures taken or planned in the context of the NAP.

78. Some reports indicate that cooperation in the transfer of technology is confined to the funding of research institutions or research projects on technologies which can help to combat desertification effectively. Most of the countries indicate a need to build capacity to handle technologies which are appropriate to the local context and have a significant impact on desertification.

79. Most of the countries state that they possess scientific and research institutions with skills in handling the various desertification control technologies. Yet research on appropriate technologies is in most cases poorly coordinated. The scant results obtained to date are not at all widely known because of the lack of funds and institutions for their dissemination.

80. In the energy field, the promotion of new and renewable energies and alternatives to the use of woody fuels is regarded as vital to any strategy to combat desertification and achieve sustainable development. Some of the reports cite a few successful cases of the penetration of efficient energy technologies in environmental terms.

81. In agriculture, some countries report the introduction of irrigation systems using low-cost technologies. Irrigation makes use of surface water as well as underground water. Some countries also indicate that they have developed prototype pumping systems for water-lifting in the context of desertification control activities. Other countries report the import of pumping systems for small-scale irrigation, while yet others have developed double-arched dams for such purposes.

82. Most of the reports say little about the role and place of traditional knowledge in NAP formulation or implementation. However, two reports mention initiatives already under way in the promotion, use and upgrading of traditional knowledge in strategies for the implementation of such programmes.

83. None of the reports mentions the involvement of the private sector in projects and programmes which require the redeployment of identified mature technologies. Equally, the reports give no information on information systems in the area of appropriate technologies in the different contexts.

III. LESSONS LEARNED

A. Lessons learned from the process of preparation and implementation of national action programmes

84. It is not easy to draw universally valid conclusions from the process of formulation and implementation of the national action programmes on the basis of the reports submitted by the various country parties. The 47 reports are all different, and each of them relates to a specific situation. Yet beyond the difficulties inherent in this type of exercise, it is possible to identify relevant lessons in the light of common elements.

85. At present, 27 African country parties have finalized their NAPs and should have launched the implementation phase. However, it is not easy to distinguish these two clearly distinct phases in the different reports. Neither is it easy to draw a distinction between projects which have stemmed from the action programme process and those originating in other initiatives.

86. In the institutional area, one of the main steps taken by all African country parties was the establishment of a national coordinating body. In most cases, these coordinating bodies have been placed in national-level offices, falling under a ministry which is most often the one responsible for environmental matters. There is a risk that this scenario, though practicable in theory, may not always facilitate the desired coordination between the various State or other institutions involved in efforts to combat desertification. This difficulty is most often aggravated in many countries by the scarcity of resources, and more particularly the small operational budgets available to the Governments of most African countries. However, a few countries have opted for a more representative institution placed above the various ministerial departments - an inter-ministerial agency, for example, to facilitate the coordination and harmonization of the activities of the national coordinating body. Conferring independence and substantial funds on the national body provides guarantees of success in the formulation and implementation of the national action programmes.

87. Although most of the countries refer to the multidisciplinary nature of the national coordinating bodies and the extensive experience of their members, few of them provide information on their effectiveness or a timetable of work, or the frequency of meetings held, or results achieved. The most important role seems to be played by the national focal points officially designated by the countries, who are often the permanent secretaries of the national coordinating bodies.

88. While the process of preparing and implementing the NAPs is generally fairly well under way in all African country parties which have submitted reports, large-scale efforts remain necessary to consolidate what has been achieved, eliminate or reduce the constraints identified and take up the major challenges posed by the phenomenon of desertification in the region.

89. From an overall viewpoint, the incorporation of desertification control into the strategies and priorities laid down in plans or policies for sustainable development has been slow and meagre, even if it is always mentioned and recognized as one of the major constraints to sustainable development. This situation stems from a number of causes, notably the poor institutional, technical, scientific, human and financial capacities of the African country parties and the fact that the approaches to be developed relate to the long term.

90. The process of preparing and implementing the national action programmes does not enjoy sufficient recognition in the corresponding process for plans, policies or strategies for sustainable development. The NAPs contain insufficient reference to clearly defined sustainable development objectives, although in most countries there exist policies providing economic and social guidance, and documents relating to strategies to combat poverty or strategies for the implementation of other multilateral environmental agreements. It seems that the ministries responsible for the economy and finance and for foreign affairs do not play a central role in the process of preparing and implementing the NAPs, in contrast to the process of guiding development policies.

91. Yet in terms of strengthening synergies, the NAPs are often perceived as components of the programme which stems from economic and social development policy guidance and is placed side by side with the sectoral programmes. However, as national action programmes have not yet been finalized in half of the countries, while implementation has not yet begun in others, the manner of this integration remains a theoretical issue. Some countries define the NAP as a basic tool of Agenda 21 or of the formulation of the strategy for combating poverty. The potential for synergies between the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Desertification is sometimes acknowledged, but it has not been realized.

92. It should be mentioned that, within the framework of the new measures which could facilitate the implementation of the national action programmes, the various reports reflect a distinct tendency to introduce measures aiming at large-scale decentralization of authority for the management of natural resources. Thus in some countries local machinery for desertification control has been established to promote the participatory process. This machinery sometimes serves as the voice of the grass-roots population and participates actively in all national activities relating to the management of natural resources and the achievement of sustainable development.

93. The process of preparing and implementing the national action programmes has stimulated and encouraged efforts to achieve consistency between them and existing subregional action programmes, in which the countries had participated. The linkages are formed by taking into account and incorporating the thematic priorities adopted at the subregional level.

94. The participatory approach is a complex exercise, difficult to carry out. Full and equitable participation by all those involved in the process of preparing and implementing the national action programmes to combat desertification is therefore an ideal which is hard to attain. Nevertheless, one of the major lessons which can be drawn from the NAP formulation process is that most countries have embarked for the first time on an irreversible process of broadening the decision-making process to embrace a very wide and very diversified group of actors. Even if in many countries the NAP formulation process is not sufficiently well advanced, a clear trend towards the mobilization of all concerned may nevertheless be observed. This is a new dynamic of participation in the decision-making process which is taking root in many places, including countries where civil-society organizations are emerging. However, it is clear that the level and degree of participation vary substantially from one category of actor to another. While the contribution of non-governmental organizations to the process may be regarded as effective and important in most countries, that of the various other categories of civil-society organization, in particular associations of young people, women or farmers may in contrast be considered as rather feeble.

95. The process of formulation and the initial implementation of the NAPs made it possible to highlight and specify the nature of the interventions needed in a number of priority areas. These areas including both structural actions (institutional and juridical reforms, capacity-building, information systems, partnership agreements, technology transfer, regional and subregional cooperation, etc.) and concrete actions on the ground through specific projects (rehabilitation of degraded soils, reforestation, regeneration of degraded natural formations, efforts to combat wind erosion, improvement of food security, access to water and energy, etc.). In addition to these actions, certain processes involving the formulation and implementation of action programmes have highlighted the man-made components of desertification. In this context, emphasis was placed on improving the perception of the economic nature of natural resources, improving the living conditions of the people, combating poverty, encouraging local people to assume responsibility in the development process, etc.

96. The NAP formulation and implementation process has afforded an opportunity to take stock, in each country, of capacity available to collect analyse, process and disseminate relevant information and data, as well as to produce impact indicators. Various workshops organized at the national, subregional or regional level made it possible to inventory and analyse the indicators already available, in particular the system for the monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the Convention, the system for information circulation and environmental monitoring on the Internet, the early warning systems and the data banks. All these different initiatives foster greater harmonization of the information systems. One may also note the emergence of national observatories designed to provide an early warning system through which emergency action can be triggered to mitigate the impacts of drought in the short term and enhance the effectiveness of decision-making tools in the medium and long term, in particular through integration of drought and desertification risks into economic policies.

97. Where possible, most of the countries have made greater or smaller financial efforts, either within their own budgets or through other mechanisms, for the formulation and implementation of their national action programmes. Some countries have gone so far as to establish a national fund to combat desertification (several other titles exist) to enable them to ensure speedier and more effective channelling of financial resources at the local level. Some

countries have been able to initiate a constructive dialogue with development partners in the hope of instituting a lasting partnership in order to be able to mobilize the financial resources needed for the implementation of the NAPs. The establishment of consultative machinery to guarantee the continuity and productiveness of these exchanges is a clear necessity.

B. Lessons learned from the system for the presentation of reports

98. The submission of the reports should in principle make it possible to indicate the true scale of desertification in each of the cases examined, and also to assess the outcome of the efforts made to combat desertification and mitigate drought. That would entail a process of data-gathering calling for a much greater volume of resources than are currently available. Insofar as the various reports do not always follow the layout suggested in the methodological guide and the additional explanatory note (ICCD/CRIC(1)/INF.4), it is difficult to draw well-founded conclusions which are applicable to other cases. At the present stage of implementation of the Convention, increased attention should therefore be focused on the system of monitoring and evaluation.

99. Above and beyond questions of form, a major difference may be observed in the substance and the quality of the various reports submitted. The questions suggested in the guide for each of the sections do not appear to have received careful consideration. When genuinely addressed, these questions should in the first place enable the parties themselves to gain an objective picture of progress in the implementation of the Convention or at least the stage linked to the process of formulation and implementation of national action programmes.

100. The reports, which are often descriptive, offer very little by way of analysis which would indicate the true state of affairs regarding the nature of problems, the degree of constraints and the extent of achievements reached in the process of formulation and implementation of the NAPs. Nevertheless, in one way or another most of the reports supply information relating to almost all the main thematic topics listed in paragraph 10 of decision 1/COP.5.

101. Comparison between the reports submitted in 1999 and the recent reports was very difficult in some cases, insofar as the progress made and the constraints encountered were not enumerated chronologically. In addition, some countries did not take into account the changes made in the guide in the light of the suggestions made by the Committee on Science and Technology.

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

102. The synthesis of the information supplied by the 47 African country parties in their national reports throws more light on actual progress in the implementation of the Convention in Africa. Beyond the specific situations in each country, it may be noted that African countries have made significant efforts in the process of formulation and implementation of the national action programmes, whose importance for all actions to combat desertification is confirmed.

However, a number of obstacles need to be removed as soon as possible, including difficulties in harmonizing planning tools relating to the management of natural resources, the inadequate level of financial resources (the national budget and support from development partners) and technology transfer, and difficulties in concluding long-term partnership agreements.

103. The lack of adequate and predictable finance is regarded by all the parties as a serious obstacle to proper initiation of the phase of implementation of the national action programmes, through the identification, formulation and implementation of development projects to combat desertification, thus establishing the conditions for sustainable development. This has prompted a search for financing mechanisms, which in most cases have operated irregularly. The setting up, in some countries, of national funds to combat desertification which are intended to provide partial funding for the national action programmes seems to have led to little real progress.

104. Appreciable efforts are being made to ensure the best possible linkages between national action programmes to combat desertification and national action plans for the environment or, in general, policies for natural resource conservation and environmental protection. In addition, in almost all countries these efforts currently extend to the national or sectoral development policies and to the national strategies to combat poverty.

105. Even if the process of formulation or implementation of the NAPs is far from finalized in many countries, a genuine move towards mobilization of civil-society actors was noted in all the reports. However, the level of participation varies considerably depending on the category of civil-society actors. It seems important to intensify and strengthen information and awareness-raising activities so that local people feel truly involved. Efforts should also be made to bring in the private sector to a greater extent, since it could contribute to financing the process of implementation of the Convention.

106. The process of formulation and implementation of the NAPs offers an unprecedented opportunity to realize all the potential synergies. Unfortunately, it must be acknowledged that synergy is more a concept than a practice. National policies continue to be drawn up and applied in a sectoral manner despite clear efforts to pursue them in the context of a global approach. The national coordinating bodies established in all the countries, which should act as a link between institutions and agencies at the national level, do not always possess the resources and the authority needed to ensure such coordination. There is real scope for synergy between the Convention to Combat Desertification and the instruments relating to biological diversity and climate change. But thought must be given to synergetic implementation at the country level above all. It is surprising, for example, that none of the reports refers to the national action programmes for adaptation to climate change currently being initiated.

107. The quest for synergy must be dissociated from all considerations of financial support in order to avoid burdening and complicating the system for financing the various conventions. Synergy must be a component of strategy freely adopted by countries. In addition, the national coordinating bodies must attach all due importance to synergy insofar as it is one of the keys to promoting sustainable development. The process of reflection must be launched and sustained by these bodies.

108. Efforts should be made to integrate the implementation of the multilateral agreements relating to environment and desertification, especially in the African context, with the application of sectoral development policies on the basis of sound administration of the latter; this integration should be emphasized in the drafting of requests for funding.

109. In most countries, the introduction and management of information systems must be encouraged and supported. This principle is essential to enable the local people and the various actors in the field to gain a more thorough understanding of the problems, but also to facilitate the study, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of development projects which correlate with desertification control. However, these efforts should be pursued in the direction of greater harmonization of the various initiatives, which would facilitate the design and use of benchmarks and indicators, as the Committee on Science and Technology has recommended.

110. Desertification is known to be a phenomenon whose consequences are more far-reaching in Africa than anywhere else in the world. It constitutes an obstacle to development in African countries and plays a major role in accentuating poverty among the populations affected. In addition, in Africa, the countries must do their utmost to curb it. In this context, it is of fundamental importance that the information in the national reports should be very useful in order to underpin the implementation of meaningful actions. Hence the competent authorities in the African country parties should devote their full attention to the explanatory note and the proposed guide. It would perhaps be advisable initially to test a system for the comprehensive review of the national reports for African country parties willing to participate in such an exercise (along the lines followed for climate change for communications from annex I countries), and to do so well before the deadline for the third series of national reports to be submitted to the Conference of the Parties at its seventh session.

111. In order that the majority of local populations should feel concerned and participate fully in meaningful action to combat desertification, it is important to intensify and strengthen activities providing information and creating awareness of efforts to combat this scourge. It is vital that the implementation phase for specific meaningful actions involving these populations in the field should begin.

112. It is of fundamental importance that the various African country parties should clearly perceive what is really covered by the true nature of what the Convention terms a "partnership agreement". Such an agreement certainly cannot be restricted to ad hoc coordination which does not allow meaningful action to be initiated which is commensurate with the challenges being faced. Negotiating such agreements presupposes that African country parties have provided their action programmes with operational content, and that the development partners involved in this effort should be ready to mobilize the financial resources required.

113. It is time for all African country parties to integrate desertification concerns more systematically into their budget lines. That would help to bring home to international opinion the priority place occupied by this issue and the resolve to combat this scourge, which hampers

the development of these countries. It is not enough to draw up a list of priority projects and programmes and wait for external funding to implement them, as is done in most cases. But the NAP will open up the prospect of better-integrated programming, because this issue deserves to be addressed on a par with all the development sectors. The implementation of the programmes in partnership with the developed country parties would make it possible to go beyond the project approach, which does not build development, does not eradicate poverty, and above all does not practically address the issue of desertification. Reforestation or the rehabilitation of degraded land requires not only projects, but also participatory local development. Effectively combating desertification certainly involves the introduction of policies in synergy with the various components of civil society in a context of transparency and above all a freely chosen process encouraged by international solidarity.

Annex I

LIST OF COUNTRY PARTIES WHICH HAVE SUBMITTED REPORTS

1. Algeria
2. Angola
3. Benin
4. Botswana
5. Burkina Faso
6. Burundi*
7. Cape Verde
8. Central African Republic**
9. Chad
10. Comoros**
11. Congo**
12. Côte d'Ivoire
13. Democratic Republic of the Congo*
14. Djibouti
15. Egypt
16. Eritrea
17. Ethiopia
18. Gabon**
19. Gambia
20 Ghana
21. Guinea
22. Guinea-Bissau*
23. Kenya
24. Lesotho
25. Liberia**
26. Libyan Arab Jamahiriya
27. Madagascar
28. Malawi
29. Mali
30. Mauritania
31. Morocco
32. Mozambique
33. Namibia
34. Niger
35. Nigeria
36. Sao Tome and Principe**
37. Senegal
38. Sierra Leone**
39. South Africa
40. Sudan
41. Swaziland
42. Togo
43. Tunisia
44. Uganda
45. United Republic of Tanzania
46. Zambia
47. Zimbabwe

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* Submitted a report to the Ad Hoc Working Group, but not included in the first summary.

** Submitted a report for the first time.

Annex II

LIST OF COUNTRIES WHICH HAVE FINALIZED THEIR NATIONAL ACTION PROGRAMMES

Country	Date of ratification of or accession to the Convention	Date of finalization or adoption of the NAP
Benin	27/08/1996	11/1999
Burkina Faso	26/01/1996	07/1999
Cape Verde	08/05/1995	03/1998
Chad	27/09/1996	04/2000
Djibouti	12/06/1997	06/2001
Eritrea	14/08/1996	09/2001
Ethiopia	27/06/1997	11/1998
Gambia	11/06/1996	09/2000
Ghana	27/12/1996	02/2002
Kenya	24/06/1997	02/2002
Lesotho	12/09/1995	01/1999
Madagascar	25/06/1997	11/2001
Malawi	13/06/1996	03/2001
Mali	31/10/1995	05/1998
Morocco	12/11/1996	06/2001
Namibia	16/05/1997	07/1994
Niger	19/01/1996	09/2000
Nigeria	08/07/1997	08/2000
Senegal	26/07/1995	08/1998
Sudan	24/11/1995	04/2002
Swaziland	07/10/1996	07/2000
Togo	04/10/1995	12/2001
Tunisia	11/10/1995	06/1998
Uganda	25/06/1997	10/1999
United Republic of Tanzania	19/06/1997	08/1999
Zambia	19/09/1996	02/2002
Zimbabwe	23/09/1997	02/1998